

Police scientist fighting for new crime lab

By DEREK OLSON

Late nights and tireless weekends for Henderson police forensic scientist Rick Workman could pay off to the tune of \$37 million as he launches his dream project of creating a state-of-the-art forensics lab in Henderson in coming weeks.

Last year, Workman began a nonprofit group called Friends of Henderson CSI to raise funds for the project. After spending thousands of hours of his own time creating the group and its Web site, Workman said he is ready to start pushing for funds. Although he works for the police, he is trying to raise the money privately, he said.

Forensics, popularized by the television series "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" and its spinoffs, consists of processing crime evidence such as DNA, fingerprints, firearms, narcotics and computers.

He said the way the shows have captured viewers' imagination gives him confidence that the project will have legs.

"I believed for six years that we've needed this facility," he said. "Until now I wasn't sure we'd have enough interest from the public to fund it."

"If I make it — and I'm assuming this project will be a success — it will be a direct result of the show," he said.

He plans to harness the shows' popularity to get the project off and running with special appearances by the actors and a chapter in a new book about forensics.

On Aug. 5, volunteers for the project will hold a special fundraiser featuring actors from the popular Las Vegas-based series.

David Berman, who plays David Phillips, a coroner investigator on the show, and Jon Wellner, who plays Henry



CARY EDMONDSON/NEWS STAFF PHOTO

Henderson Crime Scene Analyst Tammy Barker demonstrates one method used to discover fingerprints inside a lab at the Henderson Police Department. The department is currently trying to raise \$37 million to have a new crime laboratory built.

On the Web

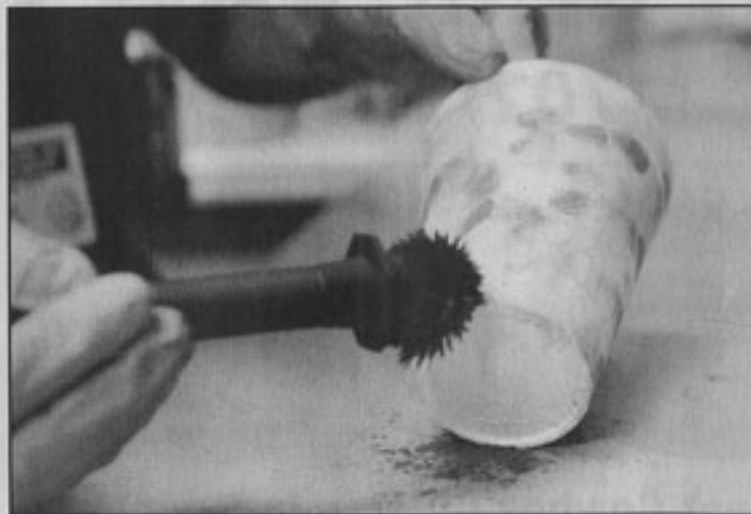
For more information visit www.friendsofhendersoncsi.com.

Andrews and is a full-time researcher for the show, will be guest stars.

Workman has also written a chapter in a book titled "Investigating CSI: Inside the Crime Labs of Las Vegas, Miami and New York," which is due out in October. It is available for pre-sale on Amazon.com.

He said the chapter focuses on the much-derided "CSI effect" and why it's a good thing. Workman said the "CSI effect" reflects some forensics experts' frustration at the public's unrealistic expectation of them.

However, Workman said with the right resources Henderson could accomplish much of what's portrayed on TV. He hopes the increase in



CARY EDMONDSON/NEWS STAFF PHOTO

Impression marks from a person's hands are uncovered during a demonstration performed by Tammy Barker inside the Henderson crime laboratory.

people's expectations of forensic investigators will lead to more funding for its programs.

"It's basically informed the public of the forensics capa-

bility police departments have if they have the space and the equipment," he said.

Henderson forensics expert Clay Allred, who also is volunteering for the project, said

funding for forensics is always a challenge.

"Forensics is kind of seen as an afterthought, and I understand that. No complaints here, because we have to think about the officers first," he said. "But in reality, there's not a lot left that goes into the forensics pot."

"I think everybody just looks at the TV show and says, 'Wow, this is incredible technology and I feel really safe. But that just isn't available because of lack of funding,'" he said.

Workman said Henderson's version of a crime lab is woefully inadequate compared with the one on television.

Henderson has two rooms for storage and analyzing. Each of the rooms is about 400 square feet. With its four forensics analyzers and limited equipment, the specialists can analyze fingerprints, shoe prints, tire marks and some simpler gun and bullet testing, he said.

The police send work on DNA, narcotics testing, blood alcohol testing and more complicated gun and bullet testing to other agencies.

Many of those agencies, such as the Metro Police Department, have such a backlog of work that results can take months, he said.

Tammy Barber, forensics expert for Henderson Police, said with the new facilities, Henderson could handle some evidence from Las Vegas and other surrounding communities.

She said, with more forensics capability, Henderson will be able to catch criminals before they strike again.

"We can solve more crimes and save more lives, and keep people all over the valley safer," she said.

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Note: All direct fundraising activity for this project is conducted through the private citizen organization "Friends of Henderson CSI". All funds are managed by the Henderson Community Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation.